

BRAC IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY – April 21, 2009

- **John Carman called the Committee to order at 7:35 p.m. and gave the following updates:**
 - John acknowledged increased public interest in and attendance at the BRAC Committee meetings, particularly due to increase awareness and concerns about the State Highway Administration's Bethesda BRAC Intersections Improvements Project. John gave a brief overview of the Committee's history and function for the benefit of the audience and new members of the Committee.
 - He also noted that the Intersections project is just one component of a multifaceted approach to address traffic and congestion in the area, referencing the Project Matrix that is on the County's BRAC web site:
http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/exec/brac/pdf/transpo_project_matrix-033009.pdf
 - John announced that he has invited representatives from three communities that would be directly impacted by the SHA project but are not members of the BRAC Committee. They are Avice Meehan, representing the Howard Hughes Medical Institute located at the southwest corner of MD 185/Jones Bridge Road, Ken Strickland representing Chevy Chase Valley Citizens Association at that intersection's northwest corner, and Marilyn Mazuzan representing the Town of Oakmont located west of the MD 187/Cedar Lane intersection. John observed that the Committee was established by County Executive Order and County Council ratification two years ago; because altering the composition of the Committee would require similar lengthy action, these three representatives are participating in Committee deliberations as his guests rather than as members of the Committee.
 - John said the purpose of today's meeting is to gather the Committee's thoughts on the SHA intersection project with the goal of drafting a letter to County Executive Leggett. Phil would disseminate a draft letter to the Committee via e-mail in the days following the meeting, with comments and re-drafts resulting in formal approval of a letter at the May Committee meeting. John noted that the Committee sent a letter to the County Executive last February that could serve as a model for this new letter. *The February letter can be found here:*
<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/exec/brac/pdf/bic-vision-lettertoleggett-020309.pdf>
 - John disclosed information about certain of his professional activities that overlap certain BRAC-related activities in order to avoid any appearance of conflicts of interest:

- John recently learned that the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) has hired Wells & Associates to look at the Connecticut Avenue (MD 185)/Jones Bridge Road intersection. John sits on the Board of Director's of Wells & Associates but doesn't have any involvement with day to day operations.
 - John is still Chairman of Rodgers Consulting, which working for Suburban Hospital and has proposed alternatives to the SHA proposal to improve the intersection at Old Georgetown Road (MD 187)/Cedar Lane. Again, John isn't involved in the day-to-day activities of this project but does interact with company personnel who do.
- **Phil Alperson provided the following updates:**
 - Phil announced the following changes on the Committee:
 - Larry Cole (who was unavoidably absent today) is the new Park & Planning Commission's representative, replacing Shahriar Etemadi.
 - Sara Morningstar is now the principal representative from the County's Office of Intergovernmental Relations, in place of Melanie Wenger.
 - Seth Maiman frequently will represent the Western Montgomery Citizens Advisory Board in place of David Smith.
 - On Monday, March 23, Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett, Lt. Governor Anthony Brown, and Congressman Chris Van Hollen held a press conference at the Medical Center Metro station to discuss needed transportation infrastructure funding to address significant BRAC expansion at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda. Several news items have been posted on the IN THE NEWS Page of the County's BRAC web site (www.montgomerycountymd.gov/BRAC).
 - April 2, SHA held a Public Workshop on the intersections project. Approx 300 people signed in. Attached to this summary on the web site are comments on the SHA proposals from Rep. Van Hollen, NIH, Howard Hughes Medical Institute, and Park & Planning. There is also a response from SHA to Congressman Van Hollen.
 - Congratulations to MDOT Secretary John Porcari for being nominated as Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation.
 - The County's OEA grant renewal application has been formally submitted and includes a formal request for \$750,000 for a Facility Study that will lead to the

eventual construction of improvements along bicycle and pedestrian paths in the NNMC area. A decision by OEA is expected in the near future.

- Phil anticipates a final report from WMATA at the May 19 BRAC Committee meeting on its evaluation of a proposed east-side entrance/pedestrian access project at the Medical center Metro station.
- All BRAC Coordinators and transportation officials from BRAC-impacted Maryland counties will meet with MDOT this Thursday, April 23, to discuss BRAC funding under the Surface Transportation Reauthorization bill. We will certainly raise the Stimulus Bill as well and make our pitch for funding for the Metro entrance/pedestrian tunnel, bike/pedestrian path construction, and further funding for the intersections projects the Surface Transportation or Economic Stimulus bills.
- **Ilaya Hopkins provided an overview of the functions of the Coalition of Military Medical Center Neighbors, particularly for the benefits of newly engaged members of the audience.** The Coalition represents over 12,000 households and includes neighborhoods groups beyond those on the BRAC Committee, and continues to grow. *The following information about the Coalition is posted on the County's BRAC web site:*
<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/exec/brac/pdf/coalitionofmilmedcenterneighbors-111507.pdf>.
- **Ollie Oliveria and Jeff Miller gave a brief update on BRAC construction and transportation activities on the Navy Med campus.** The new main buildings will be “topped off” in about a month, and all exterior work should be completed this fall. Other new construction will follow. Contractors have been complying with rules restricting them from the neighborhoods, for the most part. Those who have violated the rules have been terminated.
- **Andy Scott gave the following updates from MDOT:**
 - He introduced Sean Massey, the new MDOT BRAC Coordinator.
 - Andy noted that MDOT is sponsoring the evaluation currently under way by WMATA on the east-side entrance/pedestrian access project at the Medical Center Metro station. One potential source of funding is the pending Defense Access Road (DAR) request, and MDOT is looking into how the Metro entrance project conforms to DOD's regulations over DAR. Phil noted that several bills that were passed by Congress and signed into law included language that called for such regulations to be revised to better apply to projects in urban areas, such as the Metro entrance project. Andy also said MDOT is considering at-grade improvements as a possible solution to traffic/pedestrian

issues at the Metro station. He also noted that WMATA is conducting a study of regional and BRAC-related bus service to the area.

- On the matter of Metro funding generally, Andy reported that the Maryland General Assembly has approved a WMATA compact amendment regarding composition of the WMATA board. This is a necessary step towards implementing legislation approved by Congress last year that will result in \$1.5 billion assistance for WMATA. So far, Maryland and Virginia have taken the necessary steps to fulfill their end of the legislative requirements, but the District of Columbia has yet to do so.
 - MDOT is working with BRAC communities throughout the state to coordinate funding for BRAC-related projects.
 - MDOT is working with Montgomery County to resolve the many issues relating to the Economic Stimulus package, specifically the Transportation Discretionary Grant program that is seen as a potential source of funding for the Metro entrance.
 - MDOT is working with the Navy and NIH to see if coordinated shuttle bus service to Bethesda can be implemented.
- **Andy Scott and Barb Solberg of the State Highway Administration initiated a discussion of the SHA Bethesda BRAC Intersections Improvements Project. This is a follow-up to the SHA presentation at the March 17 BRAC Committee Meeting and the April 2 Public Workshop at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School.**
 - The intersections are:
 - MD 355 (Rockville Pike at Cedar Lane. This will include related improvements at MD 355 at North Wood Drive/NIH CVI ;
 - MD 185 (Connecticut Avenue) at Jones Bridge Road/Kensington Parkway.
 - MD 355 (Rockville Pike) at Jones Bridge Road/NIH Center Drive; and
 - MD 187 (Old Georgetown Road) at Cedar Lane/Oakmont Avenue.
 - Improvements at each intersection can include the following elements:
 - Reconfigure turn or through lane assignment to accommodate changing traffic patterns;
 - Limited road widening near intersections to accommodate additional turn or through lanes;
 - Adding load capacity to existing turn lanes;
 - Creating a new northbound left turn lane on Rockville Pike into the NIH CVI facility at North Wood Drive;
 - Installing or widening median islands and pedestrian refuges;
 - Improving signaling to facilitate traffic flow and pedestrian movement.

- In certain cases, SHA identified the following impacts:
 - Operations of the fire station on Old Georgetown Road near the southeast corner of the Cedar Lane intersection could be impacted.
 - Existing bicycle paths and sidewalks might be impacted or relocated.
 - SHA may have to acquire right-of-way (ROW) from NIH, Stone Ridge School and private properties along the affected corridors. Most ROW would be strips of land adjacent to the roadways close to the intersections, but five residences on Connecticut Avenue near the northeast corner of the Jones Bridge Road intersection were identified that could be taken in their entirety. Any ROW acquisition would require fair market-rate compensation.
 - Retaining walls might be constructed close to some residences on Rockville Pike near the northeast and northwest corners of the Cedar Lane intersection.
 - Placement of storm water management ponds on NIH and Stone Ridge property related to intersection upgrades would be required.
 - Existing streams at the Rockville Pike/Cedar Lane intersection would need to be relocated or reinforced.

- Consideration must be given to ways to limit the scope of the project because there is not enough funding programmed to do everything SHA has identified. Barb noted, for example, that Harford County officials have suggested that funding should be restricted to just one intersection serving Aberdeen Proving Grounds rather than working piecemeal on several intersections. Some in other counties have suggested that multiple intersection projects could be phased in over time, with initial phases being completed by 2011.

- MDOT is sorting through the 80+ written comments received at the Public Workshop. Many of those comments focused on the greater need for transit, better mobility for bikes and pedestrians, and the impact on green space and private property. Some residents raised the possibility of a Beltway off-ramp, which SHA has dismissed in previous discussions with the BRAC Committee. There also were concerns about the cost-effectiveness of the comprehensive plans or whether they would improve traffic at all. SHA hopes to provide a summary of those comments in the future but isn't ready to discuss those comments or potential changes to the project. There is no firm deadline for the public to submit comments. Comments may be submitted to SHA at any time.

- Barb discussed the relationship between the SHA intersection proposals and the local Master Plans for bicycle and pedestrian paths. Concerns were expressed at the March 17 Committee meeting and the April 2 Public Workshop that SHA plans do not give adequate deference to Master Plans' specific requirements for bike and pedestrian pathways. She noted the guideline for "reasonable and feasible" coordination of local Master Plans with SHA projects, and that SHA is working with MC-DOT, the Park and Planning Commission, NNMC and NIH on

these issues. She observed that SHA may find it necessary to waive some Master Plan requirements but that extensive consideration is being given to local concerns. Barb made these observations:

- Including more bike lanes without expanding existing roadways would offer little benefit to the general public and would make traffic worse;
- Adding bike lanes in addition to the work already proposed by SHA would be very costly and would require further acquisition of Right-of-Way (ROW) from public and private lands and construction of more costly storm water management mitigations and retaining walls.

Barb noted that all four intersections would include numerous pedestrian enhancements, including improved signaling, sidewalks and crosswalks and ADA-compliant ramps.

An April 17 letter from SHA Administrator Neil Pedersen to Congressman Van Hollen detailing this issue is on the BRAC web site with this meeting summary at: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/exec/brac/pdf/intersections-shareplytocvh-041709.pdf>.

- On the matter of reimbursement for ROW acquisition, SHA will make more information available to the public, including details about the appeal process. Process. Generally, SHA will offer “fair market value” for property.
- Further Committee discussion of the SHA proposals focused on concerns that these under-funded projects are short-term improvements that don’t relate to the Master Plan’s long-term vision. Concerns were also expressed on the need for improved communication with the general public, especially to those who are concerned about impacts on their neighborhoods and personal property. SHA noted they have met in the recent past and have plans to meet with several community and business groups. They suggested they would provide the Committee with advance notice of some of those meetings if they are open to the general public. John Carman noted that the Park and Planning Commission will hold public hearings at which individuals may present testimony.
- **John Carman asked the members of the Committee to make specific and focused comments on the SHA proposals to help Phil draft a letter to the County Executive.** Some Members appreciated that SHA is dealing with a very difficult situation, but their concerns included:
 - Would the intersection improvements reduce traffic or would they create new traffic and pedestrian safety issues and backups at different choke points?
 - Would the project have any effect since it is under-funded? And if the project were fully funded, would the amount of traffic reduction justify the cost?
 - Would potential reductions in bicycle and pedestrian mobility reduce the quality of life in the neighborhoods?

- Do the potential takings of private property and homes justify the level of traffic mitigation that would result?
- Would the project reduce green space without significantly mitigating traffic?
- Does SHA have a long-term vision for addressing traffic in the area that doesn't revolve around widening roads?
- What about traffic beyond the four intersections? Is there a vision for Bethesda generally? Long-term solutions need to be considered.
- With so many agencies on the federal, state and local level having different areas of jurisdiction, is anybody taking the lead on this project? Is there a champion to ensure that the end result is the best result?

Specific comments included:

- Howard Hughes Medical Institute and NIH have commitments to the community to maintain a green space buffer, upon which SHA would encroach.
- NNMC will work with SHA, MC-DOT, NIH, the neighbors and other stakeholders and believes the SHA plans are generally compatible with NNMC needs.
- The Town of Oakmont will have direct impacts and property losses under the SHA plans but was never included in any discussions until about 10 days ago. Obviously, communications must improve.
- Stone Ridge School, which would suffer significant property losses, is working with its own consultants but will coordinate with SHA to achieve the best results.

Edgar Gonzalez of MC-DOT noted that, in spite of the many legitimate concerns expressed by the community about the SHA proposals, if nothing is done then the end result will be more traffic in an already overly congested region. He noted the arcane traffic modeling processes: right now these models say that the intersections, which are already considered to be failing, probably would still be failing after 2011. But this modeling process doesn't measure the level of traffic beyond failing, and if we did nothing to improve the intersections then traffic would be significantly worse.

John Carman observed that "The perfect should not be the enemy of the good." He noted the rapidly approaching 2011 deadline for completion of the BRAC project at NNMC, and cautioned that we simply cannot afford to step away from the process of traffic mitigation. He said that even with its flaws, the SHA plans generally would have a positive impact on traffic flow in the community. He urged the SHA to work closely with the other agencies to resolve their differences and ensure the best possible pedestrian and bicycle mobility. John also repeated that the intersections project is just one piece of the puzzle of projects to address traffic issues around NNMC. The Metro entrance project, expanded shuttle bus service, the pedestrian and bike path plan for which MC-DOT is seeking OEA funding, and other projects listed in the Transportation Matrix are other urgent priorities:

http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/exec/brac/pdf/transpo_project_matrix-033009.pdf

Phil said he would try to get a first draft of a letter to the Committee as soon as possible. It was noted that the Committee sent a letter to the County Executive last February urging any traffic mitigations should promote the visions of mobility and livability, such as those spelled out in the area Master Plan. Phil said he would use that letter as the basis for a draft letter regarding the SHA intersections project. *The Committee's letter is on the web site here: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/exec/brac/pdf/bic-vision-lettertoleggett-020309.pdf> and the County Executive's response is here: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/exec/brac/pdf/bic-vision-leggettresponse-021809.pdf>.*

- **John Carman solicited public comments from those in attendance.** Amy Blackburn of NIH expressed her concern that SHA taking of land might compromise NIH's work. Tom Doerr of the Rockville Bicycle Advisory Committee urged SHA to include bikeways but noted that roadways of today can be converted into bikeways in the future if people rely more on forms of transportation other than SOVs. Casey Anderson of the Washington Areas Bicyclists Association noted that the White Flint Sector Plan under consideration is the opposite of what SHA is proposing for NNMC. White Flint would have fewer and narrower vehicle lanes and would be greener and more pedestrian oriented. Jorge Del Pino owns a home on Connecticut Avenue at the northeast corner of Jones Bridge Road which would be taken if the SHA plans were implemented in full. He and his neighbors have great anxiety of the possibility of losing their homes.
- **The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 19, 2009, 7:30 p.m., at the BCC Regional Services Center.**

Committee members in attendance, April 21, 2009:

Phil Alperson, County BRAC Coordinator
Ed Krauze for Jon Alterman, Bethesda-Parkview Citizens Association
John Carman, Committee Chairman
Edgar Gonzalez, MC-DOT
Leslie Weber for Brian Gragnolati, Suburban Hospital
Ilaya Hopkins, East Bethesda Citizens Assn.
Allen Myers for Janet Maalouf, Maplewood Citizens Association
Debbie Michaels, Glenbrook Village Home Owners Assn.
George Milne, Stone Ridge School
Patrick O'Neill, Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chamber of Commerce
Andy Scott, MDOT
Seth Maiman for David Smith, Western Montgomery Citizens Advisory Board
Paul Thaler, Locust Hill Citizens Association
Sara Morningstar for Melanie Wenger, Montgomery County Intergovernmental Relations
Ron Wilson for Dan Wheeland, NIH

Ex-officio:

Delegate Bill Bronrott
Joan Kleinman (Rep. Chris Van Hollen)
Miti Figueredo (Council Member Roger Berliner)
Jeff Miller, NNMC Transportation Program Manager
David “Ollie” Oliveria, NNMC BRAC Program Manager
Capt. Daniel Zinder, Deputy Commander NNMC

Other attendees

Casey Andersen, Washington Area Bicyclists Association
Amy Blackburn, NIH
Dawn Chaikin
Gerald Cichy, Maryland Transit Administration
Jorge Del Pino
Tom Doerr, Rockville Bicycle Advisory Committee
Neil Greene, Action Committee for Transit
Susan Hinton, NIH
Kristie Kelly, JTF CapMed
Juvonnie Kinchen-Schneider, NNMC
Catherine McCallum, Bethesda Elementary School PTA
Avice Meehan, Howard Hughes Medical Institute
Claudia Meer, Edgemoor Real Estate Services
Lashdeep Singh, NCC
Barb Solberg, SHA
Ken Strickland, Chevy Chase Valley Citizens Association
Andrew Ujifusa, Gazette Newspapers